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ABSTRACT

New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) established a Task Force on Student Assessment in the spring of 1990, which was designed to: review available information on testing principles and practices; make recommendations for reform of testing; and communicate its findings to NYSUT members. Ten recommendations were made, centering on the necessity for establishing high standards for student performance and the need for teacher involvement in development and implementation of student assessment. Principles of the ideal assessment are articulated in light of what is currently wrong with assessment in New York State. Emphasis is given to the proper roles of multiple-choice and standardized testing. It is concluded that students and state citizens will be better served by a system of assessment that: (1) is based on clear and challenging state goals for student achievement; (2) ends overreliance on short-answer paper-and-pencil tests; (3) incorporates performance assessments to provide a clearer and more accurate picture of student progress and motivates a higher level of student performance; and (4) reduces the number of tests that currently detract from instructional time and incorporates assessments that become part of the instructional process. Multiple choices for educators should replace reliance on multiple-choice tests. Appendix A describes the current state of student and program testing in New York. Appendix B gives an example of performance assessment. A glossary of testing terms and a 27-item list of references are included. (SLD)

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Multiple Choices: Reforming Student Testing in New York State

A report of the NYSUT Task Force on Student Assessment

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The people who help New York to learn.

New York State United Teachers/American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

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Reforming Student Testing in New York State

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January 1991

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INTRODUCTION

"What gets tested, gets taught," is a short-hand way of saying that tests drive instruction. This is not necessarily bad. Students quite logically want to know "what will be on the test," and just like workers on the job, strive to fulfill clearly stated expectations. But too often, our over-reliance on standardized, multiple-choice testing in K-12 education does not measure what students need to know and be able to do. Too often we end up measuring students' prowess at filling in circles on a multiple-choice test, rather than their ability to meet real-world challenges. Such testing may impede learning, instead of enhancing it.

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The need for better ways of measuring student progress has intensified in the wake of reforms and improvement initiatives underway in many schools today. In 1988, the Commissioner's Task Force on the Teaching Profession issued a ground-breaking report that called for restructuring schools to give teachers, those closest to students, a decision-making role in setting curriculum, class groupings and teaching methods among other things. New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), which represents about 300,000 people who work in New York's public schools, colleges, universities, and healthcare facilities, was vocal in its support for the reforms called for in the Commissioner's Task Force's seminal 1988 findings.

Since the report was released to widespread attention, progress has been made in many areas. A NYSUT survey found that more than 60 percent of districts statewide have entered into at least one joint labor/management reform initiative. Of the 17 different areas of reform assessed on the survey, the most frequent joint/collaborative initiatives were in staff development (with 55 percent of the districts taking action in this area), and curriculum and program development (52 percent).

However, when it comes to improving the way student performance is assessed, action still lags behind debate. The Commissioner's Task Force report called for initiatives at both the state and local district levels to create more effective assessments of student performance and to establish new statewide measures of what students should know and be able to do. But for the most part, the state as well as local districts continue to rely heavily on the use of traditional standardized tests.

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In an effort to bring the issue of testing reform to the fore, New York State United Teachers established its Task Force on Student Assessment in the spring of 1990. The Task Force was charged with reviewing the latest information and research on student assessment; making recommendations to the NYSUT Board of Directors on a plan of action at the state and local levels; and communicating its findings to NYSUT members.

In fulfilling its charge, the Task Force met over a period of nine months to brainstorm, share field-based and research findings, and discuss new directions in testing. The Task Force was assisted in its work by individuals who gave generously of their time and expertise. They included Paul Hill, senior social scientist at the Rand Corporation; Grant Wiggins of the Rochester-based Consultants on Learning, Assessment and School Structure (CLASS); Lionel Meno, New York State Education Deputy Commissioner for Elementary, Secondary and Continuing Education; and Dan Drmacich, Warren Frankel and Valerie McPherson of the Rochester School Without Walls.

The Task Force's efforts culminated in the following report, which ad-

dresses the purposes of student assessment, problems with the current system and ways of improving it.

The report reaffirms New York State United Teachers' belief that improving the way students are tested must be an integral part of strengthening our schools. Because schools are public institutions, they are under special obligation to report clearly to the public on how well the schools are doing. In addition, what our students know and are able to do is of vital concern to members of the business community who look to our schools for the next generation of skilled workers. Employers have a vested interest in an educational system that sets high standards and then reports student progress in understandable terms.

...improving the way students are tested must be an integral part of strengthening our schools.

Test results often serve as the basis for life-altering decisions. Often tests determine where a child will be "placed" -- with all the attendant implications for self-esteem, access to further educational opportunities, and career choices. Assessments can also determine which schools will qualify for special programs such as Pupils with Special Educational Needs, Pupils with Compensatory Educational Needs and Federal Chapter I aid. Perceptions of how a district performs affect corporate decisions to relocate and individual decisions to buy homes in one area or another. Thousands of lives and millions of dollars are affected, for good or ill, by test results.

Test results often serve as the basis for life-altering decisions.

The NYSUT Task Force on Student Assessment came to the conclusion that the important task of strengthening student assessments must be undertaken together with a restructuring of education in New York State. Because standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment are parts of the same whole, they must be addressed in an integrated way in order to improve student learning.

The Task Force believes the first step in the process must be to establish new, more demanding state standards for what we expect our students to master. While recognizing that children learn in different ways and at different rates, the state must set clearly defined standards for all students, creating a continuum of learning from kindergarten through post-secondary education or employment. The state's educational goals should be developed in concert with teachers and affirmed by broad-based consensus from parents, business leaders and the community. Employers should be consulted in formulating standards for the skills and knowledge students will need to be part of a competitive work force.

In light of these new standards, courses of study and student assessments will need to be revised and strengthened simultaneously. The Task Force believes that an integrated approach is crucial.

After reviewing New York State's current testing system, the Task Force concluded that the state can do a better job of assessing and communicating student progress. While standardized tests have their place, at present there is an over-reliance on this limited method of assessment. Concerns with standardized testing include:

·Too often they fail to measure student abilities in terms of real-life challenges.

·Results can be misleading and poorly explained. The tests offer little information to parents or prospective employers on student abilities and knowledge.

·Because many tests are unrelated to curriculum, they can't be used to help students identify areas for improvement.

·Multiple-choice tests seldom are able to show a student's use of critical thinking skills or demonstrate the degree to which a skill has been mastered.

The Task Force believes assessments should serve as stepping stones for student learning. Toward that end, it recommends the development of new "student performance assessments," where students are actively involved in demonstrating what they know, either through projects, a live performance of skills and knowledge or through a portfolio of their work. These assessments become part of the learning process and help students and teachers chart a path for continued progress. The Task Force does not advocate the abolition of multiple-choice standardized tests, but rather calls for greater reliance on multiple measures of student performance.

...assessments should serve as stepping stones for student learning.

The pages that follow contain the details of the Task Force's recommendations and the rationale behind them. Taken as a whole, the recommendations frame a plan of action for improving student assessments in New York State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.) New York State should establish high standards for what all students should know and be able to do at certain educational benchmarks, either defined by grade level, age or both. These standards should be comparable to the highest in the world.

This would represent a revolutionary change from the current state system that allows for a watered-down course of study and lowered expectations for some groups of students.

While recognizing that children learn in different ways and at different rates, the state must establish clearly defined standards for all New York State students. These clearly articulated goals should create a continuum of world class learning standards for each level from kindergarten through postsecondary education or employment.

New York's educational goals should be developed by the state in conjunction with teachers and other education professionals and should be affirmed by a broad-based consensus of parents, business and industry, the higher education community, citizens and public officials. Achieving such consensus will be a challenging process, but it can and must be done. One example of a workable consensus process is the system employed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

The standards and goals that result from New York State's collaborative process should be clearly and consistently communicated to all participants in the educational process.

Local educational goals also should be developed in concert with teachers and affirmed by a broad-based consensus of the local educational community, business and industry, parents, citizens and public officials. Local goals should complement state goals and should provide specific objectives that reflect the unique needs of the community. The goals should be explained clearly to all participants in the educational process and disseminated widely to the public.

2.) Student performance assessments should be developed as a significant component of the state's system of assessment. These assessments would include improved multiple-choice tests and incorporate authentic, "real-life" measures of student knowledge. Student performance, judged against clearly defined standards of excellence, would better measure the skills of critical thinking, reasoning, information retrieval and problem solving. Such performance assessments could include portfolios, hands-on problem-solving projects, and demonstrations of ability and knowledge.

The state in concert with practicing teachers, should conduct a comprehensive review to determine how well current state assessments measure student progress in light of the goals adopted statewide. As an outgrowth of this review, the State Education Department should use practicing teachers and recognized testing experts to develop valid and reliable new assess-

ments. The new assessments will include both performance and multiple-choice that will better assess the skills of critical thinking, reasoning, information retrieval and problem solving.

Implementing performance assessments will not necessarily increase the number of students who do well, nor will it necessarily end disparities in test scores among students of different socio-economic backgrounds. But the tests will provide better, more valid information on student learning that can be used to adjust instruction and respond to student needs.

Implementation of new assessments should be accompanied by an ongoing state communications effort that provides the public with information on what students are expected to know and be able to do; why this learning is important; how it will be tested; and what the test results mean.

In addition, the state should collect and disseminate student trend data that inform the public of student progress toward established goals. Further, the state should work to compare new student testing data with information garnered in the past from standardized testing, using statistically valid methods to reconcile and compare results over time.

3.) Each local district should conduct a comprehensive review of its testing -- including the purpose of the test and the impact on students and instruction. The intent of this review should be both to reduce the number of tests and improve their quality.

State exams are only the tip of the iceberg; local districts typically impose a variety of standardized exams for a variety of purposes. Districts ought to review each test to assess both its relevance to the curriculum being taught and its appropriateness for making educational decisions about individual students. A comprehensive local review will help districts streamline and improve their testing programs.

The State Education Department should provide technical assistance to districts in developing and implementing new measures of student performance.

4.) Assessments and curricula must be developed simultaneously because they play significant and interdependent roles in determining what is taught.

Courses of study will need to be revised and strengthened together with the development of new, clearly articulated and more demanding standards for student achievement in New York State. As researcher Lauren B. Resnick points out, curriculum and assessment are both instrumental in shaping the quality and direction of the educational program; they must be strengthened in unison.

Too often, watered-down curricula have contributed to lowered expectations and lower achievement for noncollege bound students. The state should adopt a revolutionary approach to learning with the creation of demanding syllabi that reflect the expectation that all students should meet New York State's mastery level of performance.

5.) The development of student performance assessments should take place in the context of a comprehensive school restructuring in which teachers fully participate in the decision-making process.

Restructuring seeks to make it possible for all children to learn by providing teachers increased opportunities to respond directly to their needs. To make this possible, teachers through their local union must have significant involvement in decisions at a number of levels. These include decisions regarding school-based budgeting and allocation of material and human resources, student instructional objectives, scheduling and assignment to classes, hiring, staff development, and peer assistance.

6.) Teachers should be accountable for continued adjustments of teaching methods and strategies in response to the educational needs of students. Student performance assessments will help teachers to routinely evaluate student progress and adjust instruction accordingly.

Observing students engaged in real-life tasks, teachers gain valuable information on student progress, thought processes, and degrees of understanding. The process also helps students learn to monitor their own performance, enabling them to take the first steps toward becoming independent, lifelong learners.

Student assessment and instruction become interwoven, since judgments about a student's progress become the basis for the next step in the learning process. Students and teachers become partners in inquiry. Students are accountable for continuing to put forth their best effort; teachers are accountable for instruction that reflects "best practice" and for adjusting teaching strategies in response to student progress and needs.

The variety of teaching strategies is dependent upon the resources and professional climate that the school provides, for example, access to technology, class space and size, and the encouragement of experimentation. The school board, the community and the state are accountable for providing these resources and this climate.

7.) Teachers ought to be integrally involved in the development and implementation of performance assessments. The state should support and fund pre-service and ongoing education for teachers and other school personnel that includes procedures for conducting student performance assessments; methods for ensuring that assessments are reliable; knowledge of the state standards against which student performance is judged; and strategies for modifying instruction in light of the new standards of student performance.

8.) The state and local districts should support the greater involvement of teachers in the assessment process. Funds should be allocated to provide time for teachers to develop and implement new student performance assessments.

Since the use of performance assessments, which may include portfolios or student demonstrations of ability, relies heavily on teacher judgment, an increased investment of teacher time is required. For example, the use of performance assessments requires time for moderation -- a process that allows teachers to meet regionally to ensure inter-rater reliability.

9.) The process of developing and implementing a new statewide assessment system should be initiated at the earliest appropriate benchmark level and should be undertaken through an orderly but expedited timetable.

10.) The state's strengthened system of assessments should be overseen by a restructured State Examinations Board whose membership should include teachers, school administrators, parents, measurement specialists and business leaders.

The Board would be responsible for providing clear and continuing information to educators and to the public about the state's assessment system, the testing processes, and the interpretation of test results.

The Board would monitor the state's assessment system, advising the Board of Regents regarding any changes in state rules or regulations that affect the system, and advising the State Education Department regarding field information, staff development, and related matters.

MULTIPLE CHOICES:

Reforming Student Testing in New York State

Testing in New York State is:

a.) hopelessly flawed
b.) the best possible
c.) good enough
d.) none of the above

The correct answer, as any veteran of multiple-choice testing would guess, is (d). New York's efforts to measure student learning include some notable successes -- such as the Regents examinations at the high school level, and the state-of-the art fourth-grade science program assessments that involve students in hands-on participation. But there are also weaknesses in the way we evaluate student learning. Chief among them is an over-reliance on standardized short-answer testing that fails to tell students, parents, teachers, employers and the community what they need to know. Too often, student assessments fail to enhance learning. Too often, simplistic comparisons among schools stigmatize schools at risk of failure without providing a bridge to success. Parents, business leaders, and community members may find themselves confused and bewildered by tests and statistics that fail to answer the questions: What are children learning? How well are they learning?

Too often student assessments fail to enhance learning.

As school reform brings with it the promise of improved learning for all students, and as New York grapples with the challenges of a tight fiscal situation, the issue of accountability moves to center stage. How can we measure the results of our shared efforts to improve the schools? How can we tell if students are learning? Are we testing enough/too much/not enough? Are we asking the right questions?

...first, assessments should be a tool in helping students learn; second, assessments should inform the public on how well the schools are doing.

In examining student assessment in New York State, the members of the Task Force on Student Assessment agreed early on with Lauren B. Resnick's definition of assessment as "the way we judge what is learned." This means, then, that student assessment should involve far more than the pencil-and-paper tests that are commonly viewed as the gates to student success or failure. When teachers assess student achievement, they may employ tests as one criterion, but many also rely on class work and participation, homework, oral discussions, and student performance on a range of tasks. Assessment involves professional judgment; testing is just one portion of the assessment process.

The Task Force began its work by asking what the functions of assessments should be in New York State. Two central purposes should underlie student assessment: first, assessments should be a tool in helping students learn; second, assessments should inform the public on how well the schools are doing. An assessment should provide information to student, parent and teacher about what has been learned and what has not. It should offer an opportunity for the partners in the educational process to readjust strategies, if necessary, or to move forward to new material. Testing should diagnose student strengths and weaknesses and serve as a catalyst for learning and teaching.

Assessments also can serve another purpose; that of telling members of the community, including employers, about the academic progress of students as a whole or providing information on individual school performance.

A statewide assessment program should tell us how the system is working, rather than how individual students are doing. Assessments cannot always -- and should not always -- serve both purposes.

The Task Force agrees with testing expert Grant Wiggins that before any effort can be made to change or improve the system, we must focus on what student assessment should accomplish. We offer the following model of student assessment:

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

Student assessments should be:

- -- Fair, valid and reliable
- -- Demystified. Standards should be clearly explained in advance so that parents, teachers and students understand what students are expected to know and be able to do.
- -- Reflective of material studied; good tests can be prepared for.
- -- Models of real-life issues, decisions and situations
- -- Reported in timely fashion to provide a road map for students, parents and teachers in charting an educational direction. Parents and students have a right to know the purpose of the assessment and what the results mean.

From the student's perspective, assessment should:

- -- Provide information for self-evaluation
- -- Help in setting goals
- -- Pinpoint opportunities for improvement
- -- Enhance self-esteem by indicating student progress over time
- -- Provide motivation for continued academic growth
- -- Model real life issues, decisions and situations

From the parents' perspective, student assessment should:

- -- Monitor student progress
- -- Give parents an opportunity to participate in development of an educational plan
- -- Communicate areas of student strength/weakness in understandable terms
- -- Show where student stands in relationship to benchmarks of exemplary performance
- -- Show student progress in relationship to peers
- -- Show student ability to model real life issues, decisions, and situations

From the teacher's perspective, student assessment should:

- -- Measure student proficiency and growth
- -- Provide diagnostic information
- -- Measure what is being learned
- -- Enhance learning
- -- Contribute to the process of improving instruction and curriculum
- -- Provide a tool for self-evaluation of teaching strategies
- -- Assist in formulating curriculum
- -- Model real-life issues, decisions and situations

From the school district's perspective, student assessment should:

- -- Make public the district's standards for education
- -- Ensure that students are meeting district standards
- -- Measure what students know/need to know
- -- Provide information on student progress over time
- -- Ensure that exit skills at one level meet entrance level requirements

at the next. (For instance, will eighth-grade students be prepared for the requirements of high school?)
- -- Provide information on how well specific programs or courses of study are working
- -- Help in evaluating curriculum
- -- Provide a rationale for community support
- -- Provide information that can be used in allocating money and resources for students

From the state's perspective, student assessment should:

- -- Make public the state's standards for education
- -- Ensure that students are meeting state standards
- -- Measure the skills and capacities a student needs to be employed as a high performance worker
- -- Communicate to employers what a student knows and is capable of doing
- -- Provide employers with the information they need to reward students who have developed marketable skills with commensurate job level and salary placements. This will establish an incentive-link between school performance and a student's employment opportunities.
- -- Measure what students know/need to know
- -- Provide information on student progress over time
- -- Recognize schools meeting standards
- -- Identify need for assistance to schools not meeting standards
- -- Avoid unfair comparisons of district/school performances
- -- Provide information on schools over a period of time
- -- Provide a rationale for public support
- -- Provide information that can be used in allocating money and resources for students

As this list shows, each participant in public school education may have slightly different goals for student assessment. A teacher may see it primarily as a diagnostic tool to improve and refine what takes place in the classroom. For a parent, the purpose may be to provide specific information on their child's progress. But student assessments, whether they are used to report the progress of an entire school or an individual student, should share some common characteristics.

The assessments we use in our schools should measure student performance against state standards for excellence. The tests or assessments must be fair and unbiased. They should be valid -- that is, a test should measure what it sets out to measure -- and reliable -- results should be consistently dependable. A test should be used only for its intended purpose.

Furthermore, assessments should measure student progress in real-life terms. For example, we want to know if students can write and edit an effective business letter -- not whether they can recite rules of grammar by rote. Assessments must be "authentic" and measure knowledge or abilities that we want the student to possess.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT TODAY IN NEW YORK STATE

The New York State Education Department's system of student assessment is one of the oldest in the country, with the Regents' examination structure dating back 100 years. Over the years, the number and frequency of exams have multiplied, with the state currently administering almost 2 million

individual tests a year. In 1991, the State Education Department will administer more than 100 types of examinations (see Appendix A).

In addition to examinations required by the state, local districts typically also impose a variety of standardized tests that are not tied to local curriculum. For instance, in one North Country district third-graders each May face a battery of tests that includes the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS); a New York State reading achievement test; a New York State math achievement test; a locally-produced math test; and an I.Q test. In another district, tests that supplement state examinations include the Boehm Test of Basic Concepts; a local Reading Inventory test; a local math test; the California Achievement Test; Test of Cognitive Skills; the California Diagnostic Reading and Math Test; and a variety of kindergarten readiness and new student screening tests.

Those lists pale in comparison to New York City's tests. In addition to state-mandated exams, New York City offers over 50 separate examinations for purposes ranging from special program placement to ensuring minimum proficiency in a particular subject.

...local districts typically also impose a variety of standardized tests that are not tied to local curriculum.

CONCERNS WITH STANDARDIZED TESTS

Today, according to the Ford Foundation National Commission on Testing and Public Policy 1990 report, *Gatekeeper to Gateway: Transforming Testing in America,* standardized testing is pervasive across the nation. While in 1972 one state had a mandated testing program, all 50 had them in 1989. The Commission found that elementary and secondary students take 127 million mandated tests a year, using 20 million school days and costing up to $915 million in direct and indirect costs.

American school children [are] the "most tested in the world and the least examined."

What does society reap from this mammoth investment of time and money? A growing body of research indicates that over-reliance on multiple-choice testing can have a limiting effect on curriculum and teaching methods. It puts certain students at a disadvantage; fails to accurately show student abilities beyond test-taking skills; detracts from teaching time; and fails to assist with student placement.

Researchers Daniel P. Resnick and Lauren B. Resnick in their April 1985 Educational Researcher article, describe American school children as the "most tested in the world and the least examined." They distinguish between examinations, which are formal inquiries into how well curriculum has been mastered, and tests, which are assessments only loosely linked to what is taught in any particular school. Achievement tests given in most American schools such as the California Achievement Tests and the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills are not tied to any school's particular curriculum. That means, according to the Resnicks, that students cannot study for them directly, making such tests poor instruments for improving or maintaining standards.

Another criticism leveled at standardized tests is that they too often show a student's ability to succeed at multiple-choice tests, rather than at specific challenges such as writing a letter or computing interest on a bank account. Gauging Student Performance, a policy paper of the New York State Schools Boards Association, says that "students can become expert at passing tests, yet may not be able to read, write, or do basic arithmetic. And even if they can read, write and do arithmetic, if their instruction has been test-focused, then much that is important (but difficult to measure) has been ignored." Our current testing system, based largely on multiple-

choice tests, waters down and fragments education by emphasizing low level skills and minimal competency.

Ruth Mitchell of the Council for Basic Education in her January 24, 1990 Education Week article points out: "The writing process introduced across the country by the National Writing Project has made multiple-choice tests of writing laughable. The pressure to introduce 'thinking skills' has become pressure to evaluate them properly." And as Grant Wiggins pointed out to the Task Force, answers to multiple-choice tests cannot reveal student thought processes in arriving at an answer. "Until we have tests that center on the qualities of students' answers, we will lack the evidence necessary to judge whether a high score is good enough," Wiggins says.

...answers to multiple-choice tests cannot reveal student thought processes in arriving at an answer.

The National Council of Teachers of English in its 1990 Report on Trends and Issues, recently warned that school restructuring may be doomed unless it helps schools move beyond the limitations of standardized tests. In a study of English teaching trends, the Council said there must be fundamental changes in the way students are tested to avoid hampering the innovative teaching that restructuring demands. Tests tend to drive curriculum -- what gets tested, gets taught. Even as American business clamors for graduates who are able to think, reason and solve problems, American standardized testing continues to emphasize the ability to guess at one of four possible answers on a fill-in-the-blank score sheet.

Tests tend to drive curriculum -- what gets tested, gets taught.

Teachers involved in restructured schools in New York are working to develop curricula and teaching strategies that reflect the importance of critical thinking skills. This requires engaging students in learning tasks that take place in context -- tasks that replicate the challenges and standards of performance that typically confront writers, machinists or scientists in real life. But despite these initiatives to prepare students to be thinking, productive citizens, student progress still tends to be measured by standardized tests that emphasize narrowly focused skills.

...school restructuring may be doomed unless it helps schools move beyond the limitations of standardized tests.

Standardized tests put children at a disadvantage because testing methodology dictates that test questions be kept secret. "Imagine," Wiggins says, "trying to improve as a basketball player if one were 'tested' by playing the heretofore secret game on the last day of the basketball 'course'" -- a situation he says is comparable to our present practice of student testing. Instead, he suggests, students and teachers need models or exemplary standards of performance to know what is considered mastery.

A parent's first concern is usually how well his or her own child is doing academically. But close behind comes a concern about the overall progress of the school and the district as a whole compared to other schools or districts. What are the strengths and weaknesses? What are the unique advantages and problems of the local school system? Are children learning?

Unfortunately, the methods used for reporting standardized test results can be as mystifying as a magician's sleight of hand. And they can be just as misleading.

Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, underscores how little information is transmitted to the public when he says, "Stop and ask yourself what the scores mean. If 58.6 percent of ninth graders are above average, what can they do? Can they read a newspaper? Can they write a good letter? Can they extract information from an almanac, graph or chart? This is the kind of information that's understandable and useful to the public and policymakers. It's what we need in order to know how well or poorly our schools are doing."

Some testing experts point out that problems with standardized testing

result from the way they are used, rather than the test itself. Because so-called student achievement tests such as the Iowa's or the California Achievement Tests have no direct relevance to curriculum, and because the sometimes hard-to-understand results are reported late in the school year, such tests do little to provide a road map for student progress.

Standardized tests too often have been used as the single deciding factor for a high stakes decision, such as promotion or placement in a special program or the allocation of state and federal funds. Property values, or a family's decision where to live, often depend on these test results.

Despite the valid criticisms of over-reliance on multiple-choice standardized testing, we do not advocate their complete elimination. Standardized tests have the advantage of efficiency; students can be asked a large number of questions covering a broad range of content in a relatively short time. Answers can be scored easily and objectively. Such tests are relatively inexpensive and easy to administer. Certainly there are times when they may be appropriate and can yield information of use to student learning. However, they should not be the sole or primary tool used in New York State to measure student progress. Instead, schools should rely on multiple measures of student performance.

Despite the valid criticisms of over-reliance on multiple-choice standardized testing, we do not advocate their complete elimination.

ALTERNATIVES TO MULTIPLE-CHOICE TESTS

Research and field experiences in Great Britain, Canada, Germany and Australia suggest that there are better ways than standardized tests to evaluate student knowledge -- ways based on "real life situations" that more accurately assess student knowledge and skills.

These increasingly popular methods of evaluation are known as "performance assessments." Paul Hill of the Rand Corporation defines "performance assessment" as students actively involved in demonstrating what they know, either through a live performance of skills and knowledge or through a portfolio of their work. The combined performances of students, he reported to the Task Force, can be pulled together in "an accountability show for the community, a list or a portfolio of essays on a familiar topic written by students, talks by students, evidence of student performance on simple mathematical tasks that people would agree are reasonable measures" of whether a student is doing good work. Hill says one advantage of performance assessments is that they "sustain the bond between school and community. They encourage school leaders to be accountable, but also let constituents see what the problems are." For employers, performance assessments can provide a sharper, more realistic picture of student abilities than it would be possible to glean from traditional testing and reporting methods.

Performance assessments seek to evaluate how students arrive at an answer. This focus on critical thinking and problem-solving skills is important in today's world, where it is increasingly necessary to know how to apply knowledge rather than just recite it. Instead of focusing simply on a right or wrong answer, such assessments reveal student progress on a continuum of learning.

Before performance assessments can be implemented, standards of excellence and goals for student learning must be clearly defined. This step -- establishing clearly articulated standards and goals -- is crucial to the process. Both higher standards that convey to students what is ex-

Before performance assessments can be implemented, standards of excellence and goals for student learning must be clearly defined.

pected of them and assessments that allow students to demonstrate they have met those standards are essential to improving student learning.

Performance assessments are beginning to be implemented on a trial basis around the country. New York State's own fourth-grade science skills assessment (see Appendix B), the Manipulative Skills Test, has won national recognition as a sound performance assessment method. Connecticut offers a range of performance assessments, including some relating to vocational skills that were designed with help from business and industry. The Coalition of Essential Schools offers exhibitions that show student mastery of curriculum. The use of portfolios which accompany students throughout their school career is receiving wide attention nationwide and is being implemented in Vermont.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests a sampling of students on real-life challenges, such as computing percentages or writing a job application letter. But while it may be useful -- and distressing -- to realize that only 20 percent of 17-year-olds are at or above the level that corresponds to writing a simple two-paragraph letter asking for a job, NAEP's information is available only in selected subjects on a national basis. However, a voluntary state-by-state comparison in math and then reading is scheduled for the 1990 and 1992 assessments.

...implementing student performance assessments will be a challenging and time-consuming task.

New York State and its communities need better information about how our schools are doing. As more and more districts move to school-based management, where most decision-making resides at the local level, it becomes imperative to improve both state and local reporting of student progress.

It should be noted, however, that implementing student performance assessments will be a challenging and time-consuming task. Evaluating essays, reports, or portfolios is clearly more challenging and time consuming than scoring a multiple-choice exam sheet. Professional judgment is a necessary prerequisite. In recent history, our schools have shied away from evaluations that rely on professional human judgment, in part due to the needs of efficient administration, and to some degree from concerns over subjectivity. Yet in every field -- from business to Olympic gymnastics, from musical performance to architectural design -- human judgment is a necessary component of assessment. According to Wiggins, schools can protect from bias and the errors of human judgment by setting clear, justifiable and exemplary standards that will be used in measuring each student's achievement. He envisions a system similar to that used in England where a region's educators would meet periodically to agree on the criteria for exemplary work and moderate assessments linked to clearly defined standards. With standards in place and the use of "moderation," one school's "A" would equal another school's "A."

...human judgment is a necessary component of assessment.

When any change is proposed in the testing system, concerns may emerge that a new kind of test is being advocated in order to make it easier for students to do well. But performance assessments will not be "easier" than traditional tests; in some cases, they may provide greater challenges to students accustomed to rote responses. Because such assessments should be initiated in response to new statewide goals that set high expectations for student achievement, it is possible that student achievement may initially appear to decline. Further, performance assessments will not necessarily eliminate the disparity in test results that often exists between students of differing socio-economic backgrounds.

Illustrating these points are the observations of two educators, as reported in the article by Robert Rothman, "New Tests Based on Performance Raise Questions," in the September 12, 1990 edition of Education Week:

> *People thought performance assessment would perhaps show that schools are in better shape, that kids are learning better, and that different socio-economic groups are performing better. In fact, performance assessment reflects reality.*--***Christopher T. Cross, U.S. Secretary of Education for Educational Research and Improvement.***

> *If the objective is to narrow the gap between minority and majority student performance, changing the assessment cannot be counted on to do that. We don't change assessments in order to change outcomes. We do it to learn more than we can learn from previous assessment.* -- ***Chester E. Finn, Jr., Professor of Education and Public Policy at Vanderbilt University***

It is estimated nationally that each student spends 100 hours a year being tested...

Performance assessment relies heavily on teacher judgment and will demand an investment in time and training. Yet we must remember that testing in the traditional sense -- with pencil-and-paper short answer questions -- currently steals a significant chunk of time from instruction. It is estimated nationally that each student spends 100 hours a year being tested; New York State students are clearly in the high range of the national average. These pencil-and-paper tests represent hours carved out of the time allocated to teaching and learning.

...with performance testing, the test itself is part of the learning process.

But with performance testing, the test itself is part of the learning process. For example, as students are assessed on their ability to conduct a scientific experiment, they are also taught and coached by the teacher. They leave the test with hands-on experience in a real-life setting and an understanding of what worked and what didn't -- unlike multiple-choice test takers who exit with an uneasy sense of questions missed, but no ongoing feedback on their performance.

Similarly, while time will be needed for teacher training in performance assessments, it will be time well spent. Training will integrate assessments as part of the educational process, closely linked to curriculum and instruction. Training will help teachers learn to use performance assessments as effective stepping stones to continued student achievement. While performance assessments do take time, they do not intrude on the educational process -- they enhance it. The benefits of such an "authentic" system of testing warrant a commitment on the part of New York State.

It should be noted that New York State's current approach to assessment -- testing every child in every subject at specified grade levels -- is not necessary in order to let the public know how the system is functioning. A valid and reliable sampling method would allow the state to assess representative groups of students to get a picture of the public school system as a whole.

It is our hope that performance-based assessments will help us gain results that are more reliable, more precise, and more useful in identifying and responding to individual student needs. While this kind of student assessment has been implemented only recently and on a limited basis in

the United States, results have been promising. Close monitoring, scrutiny and evaluation will be needed to further document the usefulness of such assessments.

CONCLUSION

The New York State United Teachers Task Force on Student Assessment concludes that our school children and the state citizens will be better served by a system of assessment that:

- -- Is based upon clearly articulated and challenging state goals for student achievement;
- -- Ends over-reliance on short-answer, pencil-and-paper testing;
- -- Incorporates performance assessments to provide a clearer and more accurate picture of student progress and motivates a higher level of student performance;
- -- Reduces the number of tests that now detract from instructional time and incorporates assessments that become part of the instructional process.

What we envision is revolutionary -- it will change the way students learn and teachers teach.

What we envision is revolutionary -- it will change the way students learn and teachers teach.

Instead of relying on multiple-choice tests, New York State educators need multiple choices -- choices in testing that will more effectively measure student learning.

APPENDIX A

STUDENT AND PROGRAM TESTING IN NEW YORK STATE

- New York State's Pupil Evaluation Program Tests and Program Evaluation Tests

  - An Overview
  - By Grade Level Subject Area
  - 1991 Examinations to be Administered

- Norm Referenced Tests used in Compensatory Education Programs

- District Level Testing: An Example - Potsdam Central School

NEW YORK STATE'S PUPIL EVALUATION PROGRAM TESTS AND PROGRAM EVALUATION TESTS: AN OVERVIEW

Pupil Evaluation Program -- Required for all students. Tests basic skills to identify those who need help in reading, writing and mathematics. Tests, administered at the end of the school year, are given in mathematics and reading to students in grade 3 and 6; in writing to students in grade 5.*

Program Evaluation Tests -- Required of all students. Goal is to measure public and non-public school effectiveness. Includes grade 6 and 8 social studies exams and grade 4 elementary science exam.*

Regents Examinations -- Offered in grades 9-12. About 35 percent of New York State graduates earn Regents diplomas, which require passing a series of Regents exams.

Preliminary Regents Competency (PCT) -- Administered in grade 8 or 9. Required of all students scoring below the 50th percentile on a PEP test.

Regents Competency Test (RCT) -- Required of all students except those who have passed Regents exams in core subjects. Seeks to guarantee students meet minimum standard of basic skills. Alternative procedures are available for students whose native language is other than English to demonstrate competence in basic skills. Approximately half of all high school students take the RCT.

* Limited English Proficient (LEP) students who have not received two full years (20 months) of English language instruction may be exempt if the test is not available in their native language.

New York State Testing Program

Testing Requirements Grades 3-7

Grade	—English— Reading	Writing	Math	Social Studies	Science	Second Language	Occupational Education
[redacted]							

Testing Requirements for High School Diplomas

Diploma	Grade	—English— Reading	Writing	Math	Social Studies	Science	Second Language	Occupational Education
[redacted]								
	8	PCT	PCT		PET			
LOCAL	9			RCT		RCT		
GENERAL	10				RCT			
EDUCATION	11	RCT	RCT		RCT			
	12							
[redacted]								
	8	PCT	PCT		PET			
LOCAL	9			RCT		RCT		
OCCUPATIONAL	10				RCT			IO
EDUCATION	11	RCT	RCT		RCT			OEPE
	12							

KEY

IO	Introduction to Occupations	PET	Program Evaluation Test
OEPE	Occupational Education Proficiency Exam	RCT	Regents Competency Test
PCT	Preliminary Competency Test	RE	Regents Exam
PEP	Pupil Evaluation Program	SLPE	Second Language Proficiency Exam

Note: Testing requirements are intentionally generalized to make this illustration possible; specific requirements for individual students may vary slightly depending upon such things as performance on other tests and choice of particular diploma program options.

The University of the State of New York
THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Albany, New York 12234

1991 Examinations by Program

Regents Examinations

Comprehensive English
Comprehensive French
Comprehensive German
Comprehensive Hebrew
Comprehensive Italian
Comprehensive Latin
Comprehensive Spanish
Three-year sequence for high school mathematics - Course I
Three-year sequence for high school mathematics - Course II
Three-year sequence for high school mathematics - Course III
Biology
Chemistry
Earth science
Physics
Global studies
United States history and government

Regents Competency Tests

Reading
Writing
Mathematics
Science
Global studies
United States history and government

Second Language Proficiency Examinations

French
German
Italian
Latin
Spanish

Occupational Education Proficiency Examinations

Introduction to occupations (Working Citizen and Personal Resource Management modules)
Basic agricultural skills
Business analysis/business computer applications
Health occupations education core
Home economics
- Clothing and textiles
- Food and nutrition
- Housing and environment
- Human development

Technology
- Communication systems
- Production systems
- Transportation systems

Preliminary Competency Tests

Reading, Form E
Writing, Form G

Pupil Evaluation Program Tests

Reading:	grade 3
	grade 6
Writing:	grade 5
Mathematics:	grade 3
	grade 6

Program Evaluation Tests

Science:	grade 4 - Objective test, Form E Manipulative skills test, Form X
Social studies:	grade 6 - Objective test, Form F Writing sample (new form each spring)
Social studies:	grade 8 - Objective test, Form A Essay test (new form each spring)

Sample Examinations

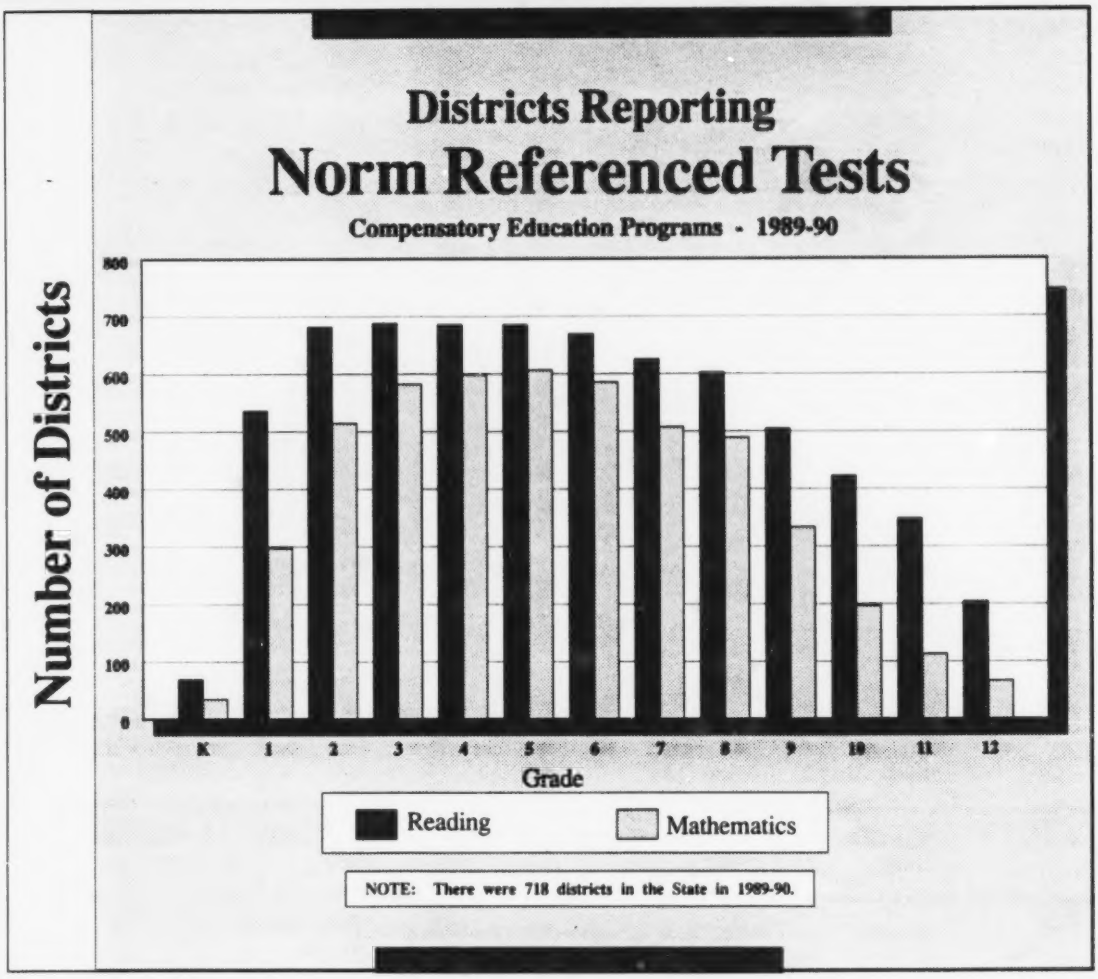
Foreign Languages:	Comprehensive examinations in Chinese, Japanese, Polish, and Russian

Alternative Language Editions of Examinations

Regents -	Three-year sequence for high school mathematics - Course I, Spanish translation of June examination.
RCT - Writing:	Native Language Writing Test; materials for 19 secure test forms translated into 29 languages (including Spanish), different form used for January, June, and August administrations
Mathematics:	Spanish translation provided for January, June, and August administrations; 3 secure forms translated into 28 languages (excluding Spanish), different form used for January, June, and August administrations
Science; Global studies; United States history and government:	Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese translations provided for January, June, and August administrations
PEP - mathematics, grades 3 & 6:	Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, and Spanish translations provided for May administration
PET - Science, grade 4: Social studies, grades 6 & 8:	Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, and Spanish translations provided for each test form and for the social studies writing sample/essay test for May administration.

10/90 MAC

Source: SED



These tests are in addition to Statewide tests [Pupil Evaluation Program (PEP) Tests, Program Evaluation Tests (PET), Regents Examinations, Preliminary Regents Competency Tests (PCT), Regents Competency Tests (RCT).]

Norm referenced tests counted in the above graph include:

California Achievement Test (CAT)
Cognitive Abilities Test
Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS)
Comprehensive Testing Program (CTPII)
Curriculum Referenced Tests of Mastery
Degrees of Reading Power (DRP)
Gates MacGinitie Reading Test
Individual Criterion Referenced Test
Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)
Iowa Test of Educational Development
Keymath Diagnostic Arithmetic Test
Metropolitan Achievement Tests (MAT)
Nelson Reading Skills Test
Other Norm Referenced Tests
School and College Ability Test
Sequential Test of Educational Progress
SRA Achievement Test Series
Stanford Achievement Test (SAT)
Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT)
STS Educational Development Series
Test of Basic Experience (TOBE)
The 3-R's Test
Woodcock Reading Mastery Test

Source: SED

TESTING PROGRAM
Potsdam Central School

Grade:

Pre-K K	Pre-K Screening June				Math-Local May
1	Iowas May				Math-Local May
2	Iowas May				Math-Local May
3	Iowas May	I.Q. Tests May	NYS Reading May	NYS Math May	Math-Local May
4	Iowas May	NYS Science May			Math-Local May
5	Iowas May	I.Q. Tests May	NYS Writing May		Math-Local May
6	Iowas May	NYS Soc. St. May	NYS Reading May	NYS Math May	Math-Local May
7	Iowas May	CAT I.Q. Tests Oct.		NYS Phys. Fitness Oct. & June	
8	Iowas May	PCT Reading April	PCT Writing April	NYS Phys. Fitness Oct. & June	NYS Soc. St. May
9	RCT-Math	RCT Science	TAP		Regents June
10	PSAT	CAT (I.Q. Tests)	RCT Global Studies		Regents June
11	PSAT/SAT Fall	ACT	RCT Reading	RCT Writing	RCT American History Regents
12	SAT	ACT			Regents

APPENDIX B

AN EXAMPLE OF "PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS"

Fifth-grader Eileen Mahoney had one thought as she sat down with a pencil poised to take a science test with two East Irondequoit classmates yesterday.

"Getting out of the room," said 10-year-old Eileen, a student at Durand-Eastman Intermediate School.

In a few minutes, however, Durand-Eastman curriculum leader Chris Spridy had Eileen and fifth-graders Ricky Girard and Gerald Whitney grinning and laughing as they took the science test.

This exam was not a multiple-choice, true-false or fill-in-the-blank test. Called a hands-on science test, it required fifth-graders to work together on an experiment called "Balloon and Breath."

Statewide, some 200,000 fourth-graders took a state-designed hands-on science test for the second consecutive year last spring. East Irondequoit schools have begun a pilot program in hands-on science tests for pupils in kindergarten through sixth grade.

In fall of 1990, the 2,800-student district will train all elementary school teachers how to administer and observe hands-on tests. Teachers will try the test with six students they choose at random. In 1991-92, all district elementary students will take the hands-on test.

East Irondequoit picked at random 70 fifth-graders from Durand-Eastman and Laurelton-Pardee intermediate schools for the experiment in hands-on testing.

Spridy, a third-grade teacher at Durand-Eastman, administered the test, and curriculum leader Rae O'Brien, a fourth-grade Laurelton-Pardee teacher, observed.

"You'll help each other," Spridy told the three students at the start of the test at 10:15 a.m.

Then she gave them a problem to write on their worksheets: "Will an increase in the number of breaths placed in the balloon increase the distance that the balloon travels?"

"Now, what does it mean?" Spridy asked. She went through the worksheets and words like "hypothesis" with the students.

A few feet away, O'Brien explained that the teachers always ensure the students understand vocabulary before the test begins.

"On the third-grade test, most of those children thought that was `pollution,'" she said, pointing to the word "population" on the third-graders' test sheet.

Finally, the three fifth-graders went over the experiment steps. Each student had to blow one breath into a balloon taped to a string in the back of the room, let the balloon go, then go through the same procedure with two and three breaths. Another student measured the distance the balloon traveled, and a third recorded results.

Ricky was first to try the balloon experiment. His first try made the balloon travel 141 centimeters down the string. He blew in the balloon twice,

and it went only 115 centimeters. He scrunched up his face in puzzlement. Three breaths took the balloon only a half-centimeter farther.

Eileen blew her balloon 129, 170.5 and finally 178 centimeters. Gerald's tally: 111, 167, 190.

The teachers said the common sense answer was: the bigger the breath, the farther the balloon travels.

"It's what they conclude about what happens that determines if the experiment is successful," O'Brien said.

The students came up with different solutions when asked what they wrote down. But the teachers didn't let them leave without making sure they understood the correct answer. The one-question test took 45 minutes.

O'Brien and Spridy said they wanted traditional tests to stay in circulation, but liked hands-on tests. The district is using hands-on tests for evaluating its science program and finding out trouble spots, not for grading.

"There's a lot more thinking," O'Brien said of hands-on tests. "Multiple choice takes a second. Zip, it's done."

The hands-on tests have produced student reactions never before seen after a test, the teachers said.

"It was fun," Eileen said. "I've never really had tests where you did experiments to see what you learned."

This test, unlike others, didn't give him "sweaty hands," 11-year-old Ricky said. "It was fun thinking," he said.

--excerpted from the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, 5/30/90

GLOSSARY

The definitions regarding testing are frequently problematic; the way terms are defined tend to vary from publisher to publisher and from agency to agency. The following is **not** an effort to reconcile those inconsistencies but rather a general attempt to aid the reader of this report by providing some basic notions regarding student testing.

Standardized tests

Standardized tests:

- use standardized procedures for giving the test.
- use standardized procedures for scoring the test results.
- use standardized methods for interpreting test scores.
- are usually constructed to cover a specific content.
- are usually developed and refined through repeated tryouts, analysis and revision of test items.

Standardized tests are either norm referenced tests or criterion referenced tests (see below).

Norm referenced tests vs. criterion referenced tests

Score interpretation makes the difference:

- if you ask how well a student has done as compared to other students, the test becomes a norm referenced test.
- if you ask what did the student learn as compared to what you wanted the student to learn, the test becomes a criterion referenced test.

- Norm referenced tests:

  - compare a learner's test score to the score obtained by a group of students (of the same age or grade level) who have already taken the test.

  - result in "normal" bell-shaped curve graphs which show half the students scoring below the middle score, half scoring above the middle score and most scoring near the middle score.

- Criterion referenced tests:

  - compare a student's score to a standard to indicate if the student has learned enough of the content.

Norm referenced tests and criterion referenced tests

- Achievement tests:
  - are designed to measure how much a learner has learned from specific instruction such as reading, spelling or math.
  - are usually norm referenced tests, that is they compare learners to a group of other learners.
- Competency tests:
  - are usually criterion referenced tests.
  - are used to measure whether a learner has learned a specific subject area.
  - use a minimum standard of performance as a "yardstick" for competency in the specific subject area.
- Multiple Choice questions:
  - can be used in both norm referenced and criterion referenced tests.
  - call for the learner to pick the "correct" answer from a list of stated alternative answers.
- Performance Assessments:
  - are basically criterion referenced methods of testing.
  - use examples of excellent performance to set standards and expectations.
  - are based in "real life situations."
  - use basically three types of demonstration: portfolios, projects and performance.
  - employ teacher judgment to determine whether learner performance is up to standard.
  - use regional moderation procedures to develop consistency among teachers' judgments.
  - are usually used as an ongoing part of instruction.

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